

HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars)	\$103.6
Public Health	30.6
Economic Reactivation	53.5
Disaster Mitigation	6.6
Education	4.5
Municipal Infrastructure	2.9
Transparency and Accountability	1.0
Food Aid	4.5



Departments of Nicaragua
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

CHANGING FEEDING PRACTICES TO IMPROVE INFANT GROWTH

El Pajaro, Nicaragua—Maribel Pastran cradled her infant son Abel to her breast, feeding him as she listened to the doctor's advice. Abel, 21 months old, had just been weighed by a health volunteer and was below the Latin American norm. To find the cause of the problem, Dr. Argentina Parajon gently questioned Pastran on her feeding habits.

"What do you give Abel for breakfast?" asked Parajon. Timidly, Pastran answered, "coffee." With continued questioning the doctor learned that Pastran feeds the baby bean soup without the beans and breast feeds him sporadically for short periods of time.

"Do you have orange trees on your farm," asks Dr. Parajon. "Yes," replies Pastran.

"Ok, there are three things you can do, so the next time Abel will gain



Under the \$900,000 USAID BASICS program, children under two years of age are weighed monthly and mothers are given feeding advice.

more weight," said Parajon. "Instead of coffee give him orange juice; instead of bean soup, feed him the beans; and third, let him breast feed for longer periods of time. Do you think you can to that?" she asks encouragingly. Smiling, Pastran shakes her head yes.

This type of feeding "negotiations" between medical staff and each of the 32 mothers gathered at this make-shift health center, set up in the community's primary school, is part of a USAID-financed child development program under both the Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction program and USAID's country program for Nicaragua.

The \$900,000 Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival (BASICS) is a community health and nutrition program designed to improve child development by negotiating better



Dr. Argentina Parajon "negotiates" with a mother on feeding habits, while a health brigade volunteer listens. The volunteer will visit the family at home if the child is underweight to check on feeding practices

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MONITORING FEEDING PRACTICES...

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feeding practices with mothers. The program concentrates on the rural departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega, areas heavily affected by Hurricane Mitch in October 1998.

BASICS uses an approach modeled on a successful program developed in Honduras called the Integrated Focus on the Child, known by the Spanish acronym AIN. The USAID-financed AIN program includes regular weighing of children under two years of age, and counseling for mothers to improve feeding practices. Nicaragua's Ministry of Health and Emergency Social Investment Fund (FISE), and several private volunteer organizations including CARE, Project Concern International, Save the Children, Partners of the Americas, Catholic Relief Services and Prosalud are working with BASICS to extend the program to more than 140 communities. So far, 2,300 children under two years of age are monitored by the USAID BASICS program.

In addition, trained, volunteer health brigade members visit individual households to check on feeding practices in the home when the child is underweight or when the family misses a weighing session. More than 500 volunteer brigade members are working in the program.

The community of El Pajaro, located about 150 miles north of Managua in the department of Jinotega, has a high percentage of underweight children. Nearly 75 percent of the infants under two years of age have inadequate weight gain.

While it is too soon to evaluate



Many mothers come on horseback or walk hours from their homes carrying their infants to the community weighing centers.

the project's impact, reports from many communities indicate that there are children whose weight has gone up since the program started, and the response from the mothers has been very positive.

Many mothers in El Pajaro came on horseback or walked miles to the community weighing center. Rosa Elvira Gonzalez walked two hours from her home carrying nine-month-old Jolibet to weigh her for the first time. Ahead of her in line at the community weighing center was 19-month-old Zaida Perez followed by 14-month-old Edwin Antonio Montenegro. Both infants showed unsatisfactory weight gain since the month before, prompting the need of a home visit by a health volunteer.

One of the bright notes of the day's weighing was six-month-old Evert Antonio Espinoza, who registered a healthy weight gain. His mother, Esperanza Perez, breast feeds Evert and gives him mashed beans—advice she received through the USAID BASICS program.



The USAID BASICS program currently serves 2,300 children under two years of age in more than 140 communities in the departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega.

USAID's BASICS Program Profile (as of Sept. 2001)

Program funding:
\$900,000

Project Focus:
Improve household and community health, nutrition and child development behaviors by monitoring growth and counseling mothers in improved feeding practices.

Number of beneficiaries:
2,300 children under two years of age

Location:
144 communities in the departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega



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